ART EXHIBITION CATALOGUES REPUBLISHED ON MICROFICHE

Published on microfiche by:

Chadwyck-Healey Ltd
21 Bateman Street
Cambridge CB2 1NB
England

Somerset House
417 Maitland Avenue
Teaneck, NJ 07666
USA

Date of publication and production of master: 1976

Series: The purpose of this series is to make available those catalogues that have lasting interest through their text or their illustrations. Catalogues and cumulations of titles in the series are available from the publishers.

Serial numbers: Each title is identified by a seven-figure serial number placed in the top right hand corner of the microfiche title strip. The first figure indicates the number of the list in which the title first appears. The first three-figure group signifies the gallery or museum; the second three-figure group the accession number for that title.

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Technical data:

Producing laboratory: Micromedia Ltd, Kidlington, Oxford, England.

General

CEZANNE AND STRUCTURE IN MODERN PAINTING

CEZANNE

AND

STRUCTURE

IN

MODERN PAINTING

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CÉZANNE AND STRUCTURE IN MODERN PAINTING is an exhibition divided into two sections. The first is composed of paintings and watercolors by Paul Cézanne lent from private collections. The second consists of selected examples of Twentieth Century paintings from the Museum's Collection.

LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION

Dr. and Mrs. Harry Bakwin, New York

Honorable and Mrs. W. Averell Harriman, New York

Mr. and Mrs. Werner H. Kramarsky, New York

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pearlman, New York

J. K. Thannhauser, New York

Stephen Hahn Gallery, New York

PAUL CÉZANNE LOAN EXHIBITION

UNCLE DOMINIC. 1865-67.
Oil on canvas, 16 x 13".
Collection Dr. and Mrs. Harry Bakwin, New York.

PORTRAIT (CHAMPFLEURY). 1868-70.
Oil on canvas, 19¾ x 17½".
Collection Dr. and Mrs. Harry Bakwin, New York.

LA LUTTE D'AMOUR. 1875-76.
Oil on canvas, 15 x 18⅛".
Collection Honorable and Mrs. W. Averell Harriman, New York.

STILL LIFE: PLATE OF PEACHES. 1879-82.
Oil on canvas, 23⅛ x 28⅞".
Collection J. K. Thannhauser, New York.

STILL LIFE: CUP AND CHERRIES. 1879-82.
Watercolor and pencil, 14⅞ x 19¼".
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Werner H. Kramarsky, New York.

BATHER: Circa 1879-82.
Oil on canvas, 10⅝ x 6¾".
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pearlman, New York.

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST'S SON, PAUL. 1880.
Oil on canvas, 6¾ x 5⅜".
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pearlman, New York.

IN THE FOREST. 1882-85.
Oil on canvas, 40½ x 34½".
Collection Dr. and Mrs. Harry Bakwin, New York.

PORTRAIT OF MADAME CEZANNE. 1885-87.
Oil on canvas, 21⅞ x 18⅛".
Collection J. K. Thannhauser, New York.

THREE PEARS. 1888.
Watercolor and pencil, 9 x 12".
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pearlman, New York.

STILL LIFE. 1890-94.
Oil on canvas, 19⅛ x 23¾".
Collection Dr. and Mrs. Harry Bakwin, New York.

HOUSE IN PROVENCE. 1890-94.
Watercolor and pencil, 16½ x 21¼".
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pearlman, New York.

STUDY OF SKULL. 1895-1900.
Watercolor and pencil, 10 x 12⅛".
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pearlman, New York.

THE CLOCKMAKER. 1895-1900.
Oil on canvas, 36⅛ x 28⅝".
Collection The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

THE YOUNG ITALIAN GIRL. Circa 1896.
Oil on canvas, 36 x 28⅝".
Collection Dr. and Mrs. Harry Bakwin, New York.

FOUNTAIN IN LA PLACE DE LA MAIRIE AT AIX-EN-PROVENCE. 1898-1900.
Watercolor and pencil, 8⅛ x 5⅛".
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pearlman, New York.

BIBÉMUS. Circa 1900.
Oil on canvas, 28 x 35⅝".
Collection J. K. Thannhauser, New York.

WELL IN THE PARK OF LE CHÂTEAU NOIR. Circa 1900.
Oil on canvas, 29¼ x 24".
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pearlman, New York.

WELL IN THE PARK OF LE CHÂTEAU NOIR. Circa 1900.
Watercolor and pencil, 22¼ x 17¼".
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pearlman, New York.

TREES IN STORM. Circa 1900.
Watercolor and pencil, 12¼ x 19¼".
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pearlman, New York.

HOUSES IN THE VALLEY (CHEMIN DES LAUVES). 1900-04.
Watercolor and pencil, 18⅞ x 24⅞".
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pearlman, New York.

ROAD WINDING THROUGH THE FOREST. Circa 1900-06.
Oil on canvas, 32 x 25¾".
Collection Dr. and Mrs. Harry Bakwin, New York.

MONT SAINTE-VICTOIRE. 1903-04.
Oil on canvas, 33 x 25⅝".
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pearlman, New York.

MONT SAINTE-VICTOIRE. 1904-05.
Oil on canvas, 21¼ x 25".
Lent by Stephen Hahn Gallery, New York.

LE THOLONET. 1906.
Oil on canvas, 40 x 32".
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pearlman, New York.

ARCHWAY OF TREES. 1906.
Watercolor and pencil, 24 x 18".
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pearlman, New York.

PATH IN THE FOREST. 1906.
Watercolor and pencil, 17⅛ x 24⅛".
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pearlman, New York.

PAINTINGS FROM THE MUSEUM COLLECTION

Josef Albers 1888-

b AND p. 1937.
Oil on pressed wood, 23¾ x 23¾".

OPEN (B). 1940.
Oil on pressed wood, 20 x 19⅝".

HOMAGE TO THE SQUARE: APPARITION. 1959.
Oil on board, 47½ x 47½".

Will Barnet 1911-

LITTLE DULUTH—BATHERS II. 1960.
Oil on canvas, 50¼ x 52".
Gift, Dr. and Mrs. Joshua Epstein, Union City, New Jersey.

Rudolf Bauer 1889-1953

LIGHT FUGUE. 1937.
Oil on canvas, 39⅝ x 47¼".

Georges Braque 1882-

PIANO AND LUTE. 1910.
Oil on canvas, 36⅛ x 16⅞".

VIOLIN AND PALETTE. 1910.
Oil on canvas, 36¼ x 16⅞".

Marc Chagall 1889-

PARIS THROUGH THE WINDOW. 1913.
Oil on canvas, 52⅝ x 54¾".

GREEN VIOLINIST. 1918.
Oil on canvas, 77¾ x 42¾".

Chryssa 1933-

STUDY FOR THREE ARROWS. 1957-60.
Cast aluminum, 36⅛ x 34⅛".

Robert Delaunay 1885-1941 ST. SEVERIN. 1909.
Oil on canvas, 44⅞ x 35⅛".

WINDOW ON THE CITY, NO. 4. 1910-11.
Oil on canvas, 44¾ x 51½".

Jean Deyrolle 1911- PABU. 1952.
Oil on canvas, 39½ x 19¾.

Lyonel Feininger 1871-1956 GELMERODA IV. 1915.
Oil on canvas, 39⅛ x 31¼".

John Ferren 1905- THE RED SEASON. 1961.
Oil on canvas, 72½ x 78¼".
Gift through the courtesy of Rose Fried Gallery, New York.

Albert Gleizes 1881-1953 LANDSCAPE. 1912.
Oil on board, 14¾ x 17⅛".

PORTRAIT OF AN ARMY DOCTOR. 1914.
Oil on canvas, 47¼ x 37½".

TWO WOMEN IN FRONT OF A WINDOW. 1914.
Oil on canvas, 44¾ x 57".
Collection Pedro Vallenilla Echeverria, Caracas.

BROOKLYN BRIDGE. 1915.
Oil on canvas, 40⅛ x 40⅛".

Nathalie Gontcharova 1881-1962 CATS. 1910.
Oil on canvas, 33½ x 33¾".

Juan Gris 1887-1927 ROOF TOPS. 1911.
Oil on canvas, 20⅝ x 13½".

FRUIT BOWL. February 1917.
Oil on wood, 21⅝ x 12⅞".

FRUIT BOWL ON CHECKERED CLOTH. 1917.
Oil on wood, 31¾ x 21⅝".

Jean Hélion 1904- COMPOSITION. 1934.
Oil on canvas, 56⅝ x 78¾".

Hans Hofmann 1880- THE GATE. 1960.
Oil on canvas, 74⅝ x 48¼".

Paul Jenkins 1923- PHENOMENA BLUE CARRIER. 1962.
Oil on canvas, 63⅝ x 44¾".
Gift, Mr. and Mrs. David Kluger, New York.

Vasily Kandinsky 1866-1944 ARROW, NO. 258. 1923.
Oil on burlap, 55¼ x 47¾".

BLUE WORLD, NO. 602. 1934.
Oil with sand on canvas, 43½ x 47⅝".

Paul Klee 1879-1940 RED BALLOON, VI 179. 1922.
Oil on gauze mounted on board, 12½ x 12¾".

OPEN BOOK, E6. 1930.
Oil on canvas, 17⅞ x 16¾".

Franz Kline 1910-1962 PAINTING #7, 1952.
Oil on canvas, 57½ x 81¾".

Frank Kupka 1871-1957 TWO BLUES, NO. 2. 1936.
Oil on canvas, 38¾ x 33⅜".
Gift, Mme. Eugénie Kupka, Courbevoie (Seine), France.

Fernand Léger 1881-1955 SMOKERS. 1911.
Oil on canvas, 51 x 37⅛".

VARIATION OF FORM. 1913.
Oil on burlap, 39 x 49¼".

VARIATION OF FORM. 1913.
Oil on burlap, 18 x 24".

MURAL PAINTING. 1924-25.
Oil on canvas, 71 x 31⅝".

WOMAN HOLDING A VASE. 1927.
Oil on canvas, 57⅝ x 38⅜".

THE GREAT PARADE. 1954.
Oil on canvas, 117¾ x 157½".

Kasimir Malewitch 1878-1935 MORNING IN THE COUNTRY AFTER RAIN. 1911.
Oil on canvas, 31½ x 31⅜".

Conrad Marca-Relli 1913- WARRIOR. 1956.
Oil and collage on canvas, 85 x 50".

Laszlo Moholy-Nagy 1895-1946 A II. 1924.
Oil on canvas, 45⅝ x 53¾".

Piet Mondrian 1872-1944 COMPOSITION 7. 1913.
Oil on canvas, 41⅞ x 45".

COMPOSITION 8. 1914.
Oil on canvas, 37¼ x 21⅞".

COMPOSITION. 1916.
Oil on canvas and wood strip, 47¼ x 29½".

COMPOSITION 2. Paris, 1922.
Oil on canvas, 21⅞ x 21¼".

Ben Nicholson 1895-
NIGHT FACADE. December 1955.
Oil on pressed wood, 42½ x 45¾".

Yutaka Ohashi 1923-
STONE GARDEN. 1955.
Oil with gold on canvas, 49¾ x 72".

Amédée Ozenfant 1886-
STILL LIFE. 1920.
Oil on canvas, 31⅞ x 39¼".

Pablo Picasso 1881-
STILL LIFE. 1908.
Oil on canvas, 28¾ x 25⅞".

ACCORDIONIST. Céret, 1911.
Oil on canvas, 51¼ x 35¼".

MANDOLIN AND GUITAR. Juan-les-Pins, 1924.
Oil with sand on canvas, 56⅛ x 79¾".

Serge Poliakoff 1906-
COMPOSITION. 1950.
Oil on plywood, 51⅜ x 38¼".

Georges-Pierre Seurat 1859-1891
SEATED WOMAN. 1883.
Oil on canvas, 15 x 18¼".

HORSE. 1883?
Oil on canvas, 12¾ x 16⅛".

Gino Severini 1883-
RED CROSS TRAIN. 1914.
Oil on canvas, 35¼ x 45¾".

Harold Town 1924-
UNCAS SET #2. 1962.
Oil and lucite on canvas, 81⅛ x 60⅛".
Gift, John C. Parkin, Toronto.

Georges Vantongerloo 1886-
COMPOSITION WITH ORANGE COLOR, NO. 58. 1929.
Oil on canvas, 23⅞ x 24⅛".

COMPOSITION, GREEN-BLUE-VIOLET-BLACK NO. 105. 1937.
Oil on wood, 25¼ x 39¾".

Jacques Villon 1875-
PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST'S FATHER. 1924
Oil on canvas, 21½ x 18¼".

Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart 1899-
COMPOSITION, NO. 97. 1935.
Oil on canvas, 31½ x 39½".

Jean Xceron 1890-
PAINTING, NO. 293. 1946.
Oil on canvas, 40 x 32".

Exhibition 63/4
June-August
1963

THE SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

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CÉZANNE AND STRUCTURE IN MODERN PAINTING

DANIEL ROBBINS

Published by The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York, 1963

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Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 63-18377

Printed in The Netherlands

Cézanne and Structure in Modern Painting *is an educational commentary that has been prepared in connection with an exhibition bearing the same title at The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. However, the thoughts expressed in this booklet by Mr. Daniel Robbins, Assistant Curator of the Museum, have general validity and extend beyond the exhibition framework.*

A commentary, similarly conceived, and exploring Van Gogh in relation to expression in 20th century painting is envisaged as a future publication of the Guggenheim Museum.

Thomas M. Messer, Director

INTRODUCTION

The present is always reinterpreting the past, not only in economics and politics but also in art. Almost invariably the painters of one era build upon earlier art, using the living example of painting and extracting from it what they most need for their own expression and interests. What painters build upon or extract from an earlier painter becomes the most important aspect of immediate history, and remains living and vital in the art of a later time.

One measure of the greatness of Cézanne is the extent to which diverse artists of later movements have claimed a portion of his art as stimulation and ancestor to their own: the Nabis, Kandinsky and the Munich expressionists, the cubists, de Stijl and the Russian constructivists, and even, somewhat surprisingly, the surrealists. Today, he is acknowledged as the fountainhead of 20th century painting and to a large extent contemporary critics depend on his visual assertions for their aesthetic principles.

One logical reason Cézanne should have become such a potent influence is that within himself he united widely divergent sources. Attention has often been called to his reverence for the 17th century French master Poussin, whom—according to an oft-quoted remark—Cézanne wished "to revive in the contact with nature."[1] This sentiment directed toward the purest of French 17th century classicists is seemingly reinforced by another well-known aim of Cézanne: "I want to create of impressionism something solid and durable like the art of museums." These words highlight a dominant interpretation of Cézanne's historical importance as leader of a strong tendency in 20th century art that may be called "structural" or "formal".

Although concentrating on "structuralism" or "formalism" as the major aspect of Cézanne's impact on our century, we should not forget that Cézanne, even while admiring the classical Poussin and the calm Chardin, also counseled young artists to study Veronese, Rubens, and Delacroix, painters whose fluid emotion and violence one tends to identify with

1. John Rewald, *Paul Cézanne, A Biography*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1948, p. 135.

later expressionistic developments in modern art. The aspect of Cézanne's work emphasized in this booklet is by no means the entire story.

Many critics under the impact of Cézanne and the cubist revolution became convinced that the literary aspect of painting, its story-telling or narrative functions, were of no aesthetic importance. In the view of most advanced thinkers earlier in our century, the merit of painting depended entirely on the relationships among its forms and colors. Inherent in this view was the belief that imitation of the forms or colors of perceived reality had no effect on the value or importance of the painting. Whether a canvas was good or not good depended upon successful solutions of composition, balance and harmony. Obviously, Cézanne—and even the cubists—were not abstract. Nevertheless, the aesthetic treatment demanded by his work is the major—perhaps the only—basis on which, until quite recently, we judged most abstract painting.

In the early years of this century, the stress of art appreciation and understanding fell upon purely formal values: the arrangement of lines and forms; the solidity and coherence of the shapes painted in terms of the space they described, all subordinated to an overall rhythm; the fundamental order that was constructed by the painter. For the first time in history the enjoyment and understanding of painting became inseparable from concepts of plasticity. There was room for emotion in these 20th century theories of art, but this emotion was never uncontrolled, it was never violent and, above all, it was never sentimental. Instead, it was almost invariably associated with the intellectual pleasure of discovering relations between forms and colors, with the detached joy of apprehending the structural key to a work of art.

Paul Cézanne attained his position as historical key to this most important "formal" direction in modern painting because structure as a primary concern is so magnificently revealed in his canvases. In contrast, most of his contemporaries now seem to have been more concerned with capturing ephemeral effects of nature. While Cézanne was deeply concerned with permanence, with the underlying stability of nature, his impressionist colleagues were bewitched by change—change of time, of season, of atmosphere.

For one thing, Cézanne's desire to fix his sensations in front of nature led him to employ a strong structural framework. As his work progressed over the years, a satisfying sense of pattern arose from the interaction of these frequently employed lines and the short, usually parallel, brushstrokes he used to apply pigment. His technique emphasized and flattened the pattern, even while he grappled with the difficulties of communicating the solidity and volume of objects and space.

It was the solution of these seemingly contradictory problems that led Cézanne to a conscious realization that the canvas was to be treated as a two dimensional surface. Ultimately, this solution also led to our concept that the fundamental reality in painting must be the painting itself rather than any reality depicted.

In Cézanne's work, much of the interest arises from the tension between the solidity of the forms and the sense of volume, from the disposition of these solid elements in a flat manner upon a flat surface. We are confronted with a drama of formal relationships in which the coordination of physical reality with intellectual order is a masterful accomplishment.

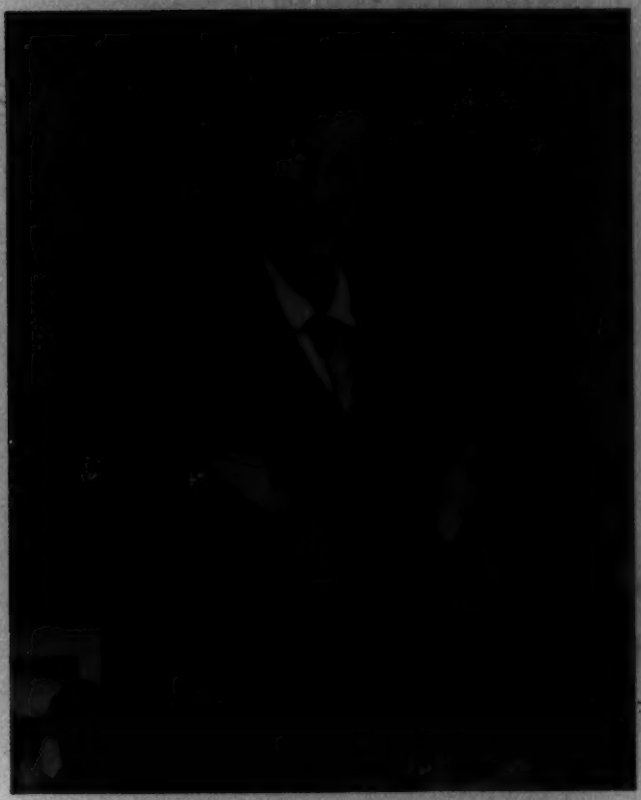
Regardless of subject, whether landscape, still life, or portrait, Cézanne's mature paintings carefully define the visual relationships among planes. In his hands, planes were used to establish the surfaces of the subject, but they were modulated with careful attention to color or tonal differences. Although these differences arose from the relationship of color to light—and Cézanne's concern for color and light is certainly traceable to his early impressionist interests—his fundamental emphasis on plane was dictated by a realization that fixed lines do not exist in nature. "Pure drawing is an abstraction," he said. "While one paints, one draws; the more the color harmonizes, the more precise becomes the drawing."[1] A very general understanding of his technique is contained in some advice written to Émile Bernard: "In an orange, an apple, a ball, a head, there is a culminating point and this point is always—despite the tremendous effect of light and shade and sensations of color—the closest to our eye."

In "The Clockmaker", a painting from about 1895 to 1900, Cézanne was very careful to detail the portion of the head closest to the spectator, the nose. He did this by creating a series of planes that examine the extent of its projection, thus carefully defining its form. Similarly, the eyes, the mouth, the cheekbones are defined; the jaw is even distorted, but this distortion does not result so much from an attempt to convey character as from an effort to demonstrate its shape and thrust. Through the careful establishment of these planes, a quality of movement is imparted to the extraordinary head.

Looking further, we realize that a similar emphasis on plane exists throughout the canvas, each part of which depends on another. The neck is painted at a very specific angle to the jaw and, in the same way, a certain relationship is established between the neck and the clothed figure. Each part is visualized and painted in sensitively balanced planes; each describes in the most precise fashion the location of parts in a constructed space. Finally, we note that a plane on the model's right crossed arm is the area that is virtually closest to our eyes.

In looking at a picture such as this, where all the elements are so exquisitely defined, where even the atmosphere appears to have been given shape, we are struck by the coordination of all the forms into an overall rhythm that is at once dynamic and austere. The figure of the clockmaker is monumental, not only because of its solid and fully understandable reality, but also because its accessories, the chair, the dado, the canvas and palette, all contribute to the total equilibrium of the painting.

1. *All quotations appear as translated in John Rewald,* Paul Cézanne, A Biography, *New York, Simon and Schuster, 1948.*



PAUL CÉZANNE 1839-1906

THE CLOCKMAKER *1895–1900. Oil on canvas, 36¼ × 28¾"*

I. CÉZANNE AND CUBISM

The last decade of Cézanne's life was spent in the south of France, well-removed from Paris and increasingly isolated from the center of artistic fashion. Only occasionally did he consent to exhibit at the large salons, with the result that when he died in 1906 his importance was appreciated mainly by his old impressionist colleagues and by a narrow circle of younger painters (none of whom were to emerge as cubists). At the time, most of the art world regarded him as a barbarian, a "carpenter of color".

In the following year, however, there was a major Cézanne retrospective of over fifty paintings at the Salon d'Automne. The future cubists were in their mid-twenties and some of them, especially Picasso and Braque, were already experienced painters whose work was leading in a direction that made them ripe to appreciate the qualities of Cézanne. Others, like Delaunay, Metzinger and Gleizes, had been either pupils of artists already familiar with Cézanne, or closely associated with a group of writers whose idealistic views on the nature of art predisposed them to sympathize with Cézanne.

In terms of visual appearance, Cézanne's composition, his careful juxtaposition of planes, and his unhesitating readiness to adjust forms to the overall needs of the picture plane, exerted the most profound influence on the young painters. In terms of intellectual conclusions, it was clear to them that the structure of a painting made it a tangible reality in itself, a reality free from the objects it had begun by representing. This lesson became the premise of all formal abstract art in the 20th century.

During his lifetime, Cézanne had written or said a great deal that appears to strengthen the conclusions drawn from his work by cubists and later abstract artists. But although one of his most famous dicta was: "see in nature the cylinder, the sphere, the cone...", one sees very little of these particular

geometric forms in Cézanne's paintings. Furthermore, most of his statements were unknown to artists during the vital years of cubism's development. It is also important to remember that for Cézanne, the depiction of nature and the understanding of nature's light through color was of primary significance. The cubists built their art upon a final result of Cézanne's work, but that result was nevertheless almost incidental to the master's basic intention in which the balance of perceived nature and pictorial order remained his essential preoccupation.

In their fundamental (and revolutionary) emphasis on pictorial order, the cubists drew support from Cézanne's numerous unfinished paintings and frequently even from the unfinished *appearance* of those canvases or watercolors that Cézanne felt he *had* finished. Toward the end of his life, the master wrote: "Now, being old, nearly seventy years, the sensations of color, which give light, are the reasons for the abstractions which prevent me from either covering my canvas or continuing the delimitation of objects when their points of contact are fine and delicate; from which it results that my image or picture is incomplete..." This touching comment reveals how deeply Cézanne felt the difference between concepts of an innate structure or order in nature and the freshness of his immediate sensations when actually looking at nature. It was precisely because motifs and sensations, those key ideas of the impressionists, were so important to him that he would never consider an abstract painting anything but an unfinished work.

In 1903, he wrote to Vollard, "I am working obstinately; I am beginning to see the promised land. Shall I be like the

leader of the Hebrews, or shall I be able to enter it?" If the promised land was cubism, which so logically developed out of the painting and compositional techniques of Cézanne, the old master would not have wished to enter it.

Nevertheless, the early cubists saw between themselves and Cézanne "only a difference of intensity." In the first book on cubism, Gleizes and Metzinger wrote: "To understand Cézanne is to foresee cubism," and they went on to explain how the art of painting had passed from depiction of superficial reality, the mere appearance of things, to understanding the profound reality of form. "To discern a form," they wrote, "is to verify a pre-existent idea." They pointed out that in this process of verification, or seeing, all individual and cultural experience intervened. In other words, in looking at a shape, one must be aware that all its dimensions are not visible from a single point of view. Cubist painting was no longer to convey false illusions, but was to expand the engagement of reality and communicate a great deal more of what the painter felt and knew. "Let the picture imitate nothing" declared the cubists, and they meant most particularly that it should not imitate space by using convergent lines of perspective. There were two reasons for this dictum: that in reality forms do not converge in space; and that the surface space of the picture plane is flat and should not under any circumstances be confused with the extended space of the world we see.

The formulation of such propositions and their derivation and interaction with the practice of painting constituted the basis for cubism, the most complete artistic revolution since the Renaissance.

One reason still life was popular with certain cubists, especially Braque, Picasso, and Juan Gris, was because its real penetration of space was naturally limited. It also provided a clear opportunity for painters to experiment with the analysis of relatively few forms and, in doing so, to demonstrate that the most commonplace visual perception could be endowed with astonishing richness.

In this canvas, "Violin and Palette", the violin is examined from several viewpoints at the same time. The elegant twist of its neck scroll presents visual analogies to the curve of the violin body and to the familiar cuts of the "f" shaped sound holes, incisions whose thin curves on the surface plane are given depth or flatness as the planes beneath them alter our point of view. The graceful curves of the violin are repeated in the palette at the top of the canvas, measured against the counter rhythm of the curtain to its right, suggesting further visual and mental associations. The strings of the violin are made analogous to the staff lines of the music, music which is itself treated to bring out the crinkly, almost fluid quality of paper compared to the solid and fixed form of a violin. Because of the distortion of the right hand page of music, we can almost hear the snap of the heavy paper; because of the way in which the musical lines run off the page, we are certainly conscious of the difficulty a musician might have in making the music book lie flat.

The whole picture is treated as a unity with limited and sober color used to reinforce its structure. Although the principle view of the violin draws our gaze downward, and although it is clearly located in front of the music which is at eye level, there is no division of the painting into fore-, middle and backgrounds. In this treatment of an independent reality, all of the shapes are integrated and balanced against each other. Everything is in its proper place. But when a line was needed to reinforce a rhythm, Braque did not hesitate to paint it. For example, the fold in the sheet music was made to continue through the violin, thus establishing an axial division down the narrow canvas. Similarly, the strong parallel brush strokes emphasize the division of the violin and music into discreet areas and planes and, above all, they remind us by their strength and by the quality of touch that we are examining a PAINTING. This painting is proud to be a painting, not a reproduction of a violin and palette in a room.

GEORGES BRAQUE 1882-

VIOLIN AND PALETTE *1910. Oil on canvas, 36¼ × 16¼"*

II. NEO-PLASTICISM AND SUPREMATISM

In October of 1917, the Dutch painters Piet Mondrian, Theo van Doesburg and Bart van der Leck, brought out the first issue of the art review "De Stijl." It included the first part of a long essay called "Neo-Plasticism" in which Mondrian verbalized his thoughts on painting and art. To what he felt was a logical continuation of cubism, he consciously added the important principle that all artists ought to help create a common plastic art suited to the needs of an organic society. The artists of "De Stijl" envisioned an art of such universal harmony that its absolute principles could be applied, like natural laws, to all artifacts made and used by man.

Mondrian rather optimistically believed that harmony and unity were inherent characteristics of man's mind. He was convinced that these elements would find pictorial expression if the artist concentrated on balanced relations between primary colors and the juxtaposition of flat planes set at right angles, for the right angle brought into equilibrium two extremes; it reconciled opposing forces. Furthermore, Mondrian was convinced that if art led the way in establishing harmony, if its

principles were integrated into all artifacts of the modern environment, "unity in man will also grow toward the positive and determinate."

Around the turn of the century, Mondrian's intellect had been influenced by the Dutch symbolists who had sought to establish an art of spiritual rather than literal truth. Although this early stimulus was partially responsible for his idealism, the critical factor for development of his painting was his familiarity with cubism. He had spent the years 1911 to 1914 in Paris where, like the cubists, he learned that the internal structural relations among objects were more important than their external shapes. For a while he found satisfaction in the use of the surface-defining plane, but within a few years he decided that the cubists lacked courage, that they were unwilling to follow their own premises to their logical conclusion: concern only for composition, structure and unity. If this principle and its inherent disregard for the physical appearance of nature were to be fully applied, Mondrian argued, the orderly essence of the universe could be abstracted and revealed for mankind.

A broadly similar development had already occurred in Russia, where, by 1913, Malewich had established a kind of painting "suprematism", by which he meant the "supremacy of PURE emotion in art". Although he had not been to Paris, Malewich had also undergone a formative experience with cubism by means of reproductions in magazines, exhibitions, and exposure to the great cubist paintings amassed by eager Moscow collectors. In considering a canvas such as his 1913 black square on a white ground, it is perhaps difficult for us to conceive of such simple geometric forms as "pure emotion", but these words indicate the degree to which Malewich wished to purge emotion, like form, of all vitiating or weakening elements. In his view, emotion ought not to be clouded by sentiment any more than pure construction should be weighed down by representational "ballast". He wished to distill an absolute truth from the welter of experience.

"Morning in the Country After Rain", 1911, shows Malewich adjusting cubism to the needs of his own temperament and environment. Unlike the traditional cubist still life already discussed (see p. 17), the subject here implies deep space since it is a landscape of a Russian village. Because the subject involves space, and because it also suggests social activity, Malewich seems to be more closely allied to the works of the cubists Le Fauconnier, Léger and Gleizes than to those of Picasso and Braque. In his treatment of space, Malewich —like Le Fauconnier and Gleizes—suggests distance by means of scale rather than perspective. (For example, the women carrying pails are much larger than the striding man who pulls a sledge.) Instead of splintering forms into a myriad complex of planes—in the manner of Picasso and Braque—Malewich simplifies shapes into major geometrical figures: skirts as trapezoids; hats and roofs as triangles; walls and windows as parallelograms and squares; smoke from chimneys as circles.

Almost all of these forms are solidly modeled but, from the point of view of light, this is done in an entirely arbitrary fashion. The woman on the right wears a bright red skirt which fades into white on one side, while her upper garment blends from black through grey to white in the opposite direction. This treatment, even the reversal, is exactly the opposite in the color arrangement of the other woman. As a consequence, a dynamic rhythm is imparted to both figures, creating a motion that seems to emphasize the purposeful treatment of their feet, expressing the quality of their movement as pail-carriers.

Again in contrast to the Braque still life, the Malewich colors are few but very bright. Through repetition, they operate as an important factor in the total organization of the picture plane, for our eyes tend immediately to relate all the forms of one hue, all the bright reds or all the intense blues. By his repeated application of intense colors the artist has overcome the effect of depicted depth. Because the red of the sky and distant rooftops is as vibrant as the red of a skirt, the objects that are further away in natural reality are made to conform to the flat picture plane in the reality of this painting.

KASIMIR MALEWICH 1878-1935

MORNING IN THE COUNTRY AFTER RAIN *1911. Oil on canvas, 31⅛ × 31⅛"*

This exceptionally rich and complex canvas indicates Mondrian's experimentation with the arrangement of color planes and black lines in order to achieve a unified flow of space. At the time this painting was made, Mondrian had left cubism but, as the black, blue and shades of ochre and rose attest, he had not yet decided to reduce his palette to primary colors alone. Despite his preoccupation with compositional order, Mondrian in 1916 was still attracted by the sensual quality of pigment. This is most apparent near the perimeter where he varied his tones and permitted us to see the struggle between the rectangular, semi-erased black lines and the grey areas. It is this struggle, in which the greys gain an advantage, that modifies the whole format into an elegant oval.

Like the Malewich painting of a Russian village—but even more consistently and more subtly—Mondrian here relates each plane to others of the same color. As the pattern produced by each color emerges, we discover swift diagonal curves which are countered and controlled by the uncompromising rectangularity of the black lines. In fact, whether read as groups of separate colors or as groups of one color flickering in contrast to those of different colors, any series of planes tends to establish a sweeping diagonal rhythm. This rhythm varies in intensity because Mondrian has modulated tones and the area covered by each tone, reducing both brilliance and scale toward the edges of the picture.

In order to make the painting structurally balanced as well as fluid, Mondrian had to insure the regularity of the composition, had to maintain order among all these vibrant squares. To achieve this, he has used a grey tone which, through its interaction with the black lines, governs the flow of color among the various other squares. In effect, with but few interruptions, this grey ground allows space to flow on the same plane from one grey square and rectangle to another. In contrast, however, the black right-angled lines rarely permit any colored square (blue or ochre or rose) to flow into another even though they frequently allow the grey to pass through. This flow, however, is always regulated to produce right angles.

Finally, this particular Composition gives us an unusual opportunity to examine the extent of Mondrian's preoccupation with overall balance. At the bottom of the canvas, by joining a ¼ inch strip of wood, he was able to paint two horizontal black lines on a grey ground. These lines fix the composition irrevocably, keeping it utterly stable within the dimensions of the painting, reconciling diversity with harmony.

PIET MONDRIAN 1872-1944

COMPOSITION *1916. Oil on canvas and wood strip, 47¾ × 29¼"*

III. THE BAUHAUS

Guillaume Apollinaire in 1913 wrote: "Neither the new painters nor their elders intended to be geometricians. But one might say that geometry is to the plastic arts what grammar is to writing."[1] By the end of the first world war, great numbers of advanced painters had accepted geometric forms as the primary basis of their art. The disposition of these forms, however, was not confined to the regularizing horizontals and verticals so masterfully handled by Mondrian (see p. 23). In the Bauhaus, as in Russia, many artists employed shooting diagonal lines, curves and circles to express a sense of tremendous movement in space.

Building on the doctrine that created works were to be expressions of their own absolute reality rather than reproductions of a pre-existent reality, it became clear that art was, in fact, design and that design was art. The form of a machine, for example, could be considered in the same way as a painting or sculpture. In formal terms, it could be beautiful or ugly in

1. Guillaume Apollinaire, *Les Peintres Cubistes*, Paris, Eugéne Figuière, 1913, p. 17.

relation to the beauty or clarity of its design. The very precision and logic of this new geometric art were also qualities of a machine; the principles of both were absolute and, once created, unchangeable.

Although aesthetic consideration of a machine might be made purely on the basis of its design, of its ability to work efficiently as interacting forms, it was also possible to consider its formal qualities, or design, in relation to its function, or production. It qualified as a totally new genre of art with a capacity to generate a fresh standard of beauty and to fuse art and life in a new and ideal society. Because it was believed that art could be completely integrated with life, and that it was valid in any medium, artists became increasingly preoccupied with the application of design principles to the world of technology. One Russian, Rodchenko, even declared that there was no further need for painting and devoted himself entirely to industrial design and typography.

Perhaps the most fruitful union of all these tendencies emphasizing the aesthetic independence of constructed works took place at the Bauhaus, in Germany. The Bauhaus was a school, first in Weimar and then in Dessau, which merged the teaching of "fine" and "applied" arts and, as illustrated by its great stress on architecture, made it impossible to separate the two. Its ultimate purpose was to integrate the new principles of art into man's contemporary environment. To accomplish this end, it selected as professors many of the great masters and innovators of abstract art. These men, through their work, through the curriculum they developed, and through their pupils, were most directly responsible for the concept o "functionalism" in modern aesthetics. Thus, artists like Moholy-Nagy not only created paintings, but also designed type faces, books, and objects. Simultaneously, however, men such as Klee and Kandinsky developed the application of formal and precise techniques to the expression of human experience and feeling.

Hungarian-born Laszlo Moholy-Nagy had absorbed most of the principles of Russian constructivism before 1923 when he joined the Bauhaus faculty. The canvas "A II", dating from the following year, illustrates how totally divorced an individual work had become from any association outside of its own immediate structure and appearance. Even its title, "A II", helps to establish this independence.

On the natural linen of the canvas, a neat black parallelogram has been constructed. Where it is intersected by a smaller bright yellow parallelogram, a red circle has been overlaid and it is apparent that this circle governs the precarious meeting of opposing color values. For example, where the red circle overlaps both the yellow and black, a brownish tone rather like that of the natural canvas appears. This hue contrasts with the color produced by yellow over black or by red over black, both resulting from the overlap of only two planes. The color changes in the major (upper) configuration are extraordinarily complex, yet if we notice the paler echo of these relationships toward the lower left, where scale and proportion have been reduced, we may discover still more intricate transparent overlays. Here the lemon yellow—a reflection of the bright yellow above—passes through a white plane which also determines the exact value of the lightest pink as this plane intersects the small reprise of the upper circle.

By their placement, angularity and proportions, both configurations establish an extremely strong movement in a constructed space. Across the canvas this motion is read as an upward and outward thrust, with the smaller, paler series of transparent planes below and behind the upper and more intense set. Within a context established by color and geometrical forms, Moholy-Nagy has transformed what would seem to be simple and regulated means into an intellectually challenging and stimulating drama of forces.

LASZLO MOHOLY-NAGY 1895-1946

***A II** 1924. Oil on canvas, 45⅛ × 53½"*

Paul Klee, like Moholy-Nagy, was a professor at the Bauhaus. But unlike many of his colleagues, his main concern was not the creation of work so rigidly free from outer associations. Instead, he desired to exploit conscious and unconscious human experiences, directing these through the delicate filter of his temperament but expressing them with the tools of plastic—even abstract—forms.

In "The Open Book", Klee has arranged geometric forms so that they incline and rotate in a constructed depth. Only one of these forms, however, (at the right) has any thickness or definable solidity. The others are surrounded by a network of fine scratchy lines that create a glow, not of real atmosphere but of mental reverence. While the rendering and distribution of these shapes create an illusion not unlike the leaves of a book, it is clear that a real book is not imitated and that the artist did not attempt to abstract the essence of a book's form. Rather, within the interlocking structure, itself satisfying to look at because of its restful harmony, Klee tried to visualize his feelings about the book, to suggest something poetic and profound about the idea of a book. He used geometric means toward entirely emotional ends; he reinforced the reverent mood with an exotic texture and rich brown color reminiscent of old leather binding.

The picture gives an impression of opening, of unfolding like a book, and this analogy reveals the deliberate and delicate humor of the artist. The outermost forms recall leather binding, the white glowing pages are treated like old foxed paper. The deep content of the book is fixed in black mystery and, well within, we find a triangle with tiny brown squares: the mystery of the printed word. While the picture is complete in itself as a structure, the structure is treated so as to invite and excite emotional associations.

PAUL KLEE 1879-1940

OPEN BOOK, #8 *1930. Oil on canvas, 17⅞ × 16¼"*

IV. TOWARD CONTEMPORARY ART

The originators of the concept that established construction, composition, arrangement of forms and color relationships as the primary qualities of art continued to develop and refine their painting, always struggling to achieve the purity of their goal. Many new artists were drawn to the effort, with the result that by the 1920's it had become the dominant mode of plastic expression. Its influence on our century has been so pronounced that all art—even that of the distant past—has come to be discussed in terms of new key words such as composition, structure, balance, tension and related concepts such as visual problems and solutions.

In recent years, however, large numbers of artists have systematically challenged the formal and orderly in painting. Their work has given rise to concepts of the informal, the anti-compositional, or even the anti-art as elements necessary to our appreciation of works of art. Our acceptance of the structural concept is so strong that we can only talk about this challenge to it by using its own standards and terms in a negative inversion. To be sure, much contemporary painting arises from another tradition, surrealism, which became an avant-garde just when the structural current became dominant—although it had far earlier roots in expressionist painting. But it is also true that to place primary emphasis on factors other than structural integrity was an age-old feature of art and, even in precise geometric abstraction, some artists consciously retained the seed of inner meaning, insisting that the work of art was more than the sum of its parts and that even if it could be rationally constructed, its essential nature was mysterious, inexplicable and emotional.

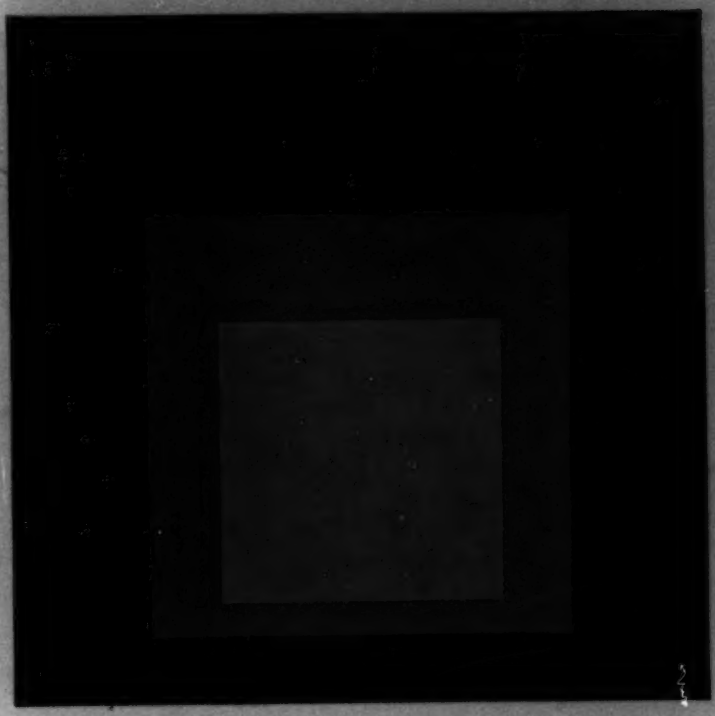
We have already observed how Paul Klee was as concerned as any artist of his time with line, plane, depth, motion, color and proportion. Employing these fundamental attributes of his vision and painting, he nevertheless emphasized a deep, even romantic, engagement of nature and human feelings. We may conveniently take Klee as a signpost for an important direction toward contemporary art: a tendency toward immediate emotional expression which is still presented in essentially geometric terms. Similarly, a good deal of the so-called hard-edge painting and the blurred single-image canvases of today are able to use the techniques and means of traditional geometric construction for intensely personal and emotional ends. Reversing the previous tendency of most artists who worked along structural, formal lines, gradually stripping and simplifying their vocabulary, the contemporary formalists are inserting, adding elements, using simplified techniques for complex expression rather than pure design.

Josef Albers, who in 1933 left the Bauhaus to work in the United States, has evolved an art where the primary effect is emotional and sometimes closely tied to nature. Although the basic arrangement of squares on the canvas is present throughout his continuous series, "Homage to the Square", each work is totally different in effect, beauty and interest. To a large extent, this extraordinary and often unsuspected variety depends on the interaction of simple forms with very complicated color arrangements. In effect, Albers is a magician with color. He has distinguished between the physical fact of color and its psychological impact according to the context in which it is placed. He can make different colors look identical, and he can make a single color look like two. He can create color where none exists, turning a grey into violet or yellow. The visual consequences of such color magic are enormous, but one of the most obvious is an intense sense of flashing movement.

This canvas is composed of three squares painted upon a fourth square which is defined by the edge of the canvas. Each is placed in precisely identical relationship to its enclosing neighbor. However, the series is not proportional to the square of the canvas itself because its progression is downward instead of toward the center. This downward motion is emphasized by the horizontal color areas which, simply because of their width, create completely different effects at the top and bottom of the painting. Thus, their greater width at the top provides stability while their narrowness at the bottom fosters rapid and changing relationships between each band and its neighbor.

To illustrate the infinite consequences of this seemingly simple fact, consider the effects produced by just one aspect of this painting: the warm green bands across the top and bottom, varying from each other only in width. Because it seems warmer at the top than at the bottom, we tend to read the outer square, reinforced by diagonal lines, as projecting; but at the bottom we tend to read the same outer square as receding. Refusing to hold still, the entire structure moves back and forth. Similarly, each facet of the painting contributes to its changing effect. The more one looks, the more baffling the picture becomes, moving, shimmering, sometimes allowing the yellow square to jump forward, sometimes thrusting it back; sometimes encouraging the grey square to look warm, sometimes forcing it be seem cold.

Thus, for all the regularity of the shapes and flatness of the few actual colors applied, this painting is wholly equivocal in effect. In terms of the conventional sense of the structural aesthetic, it produces a sense of frustration for it forces the viewer to recognize tension within balance, ambiguity within precision, and change within established relationships.



JOSEF ALBERS 1888-

HOMAGE TO THE SQUARE: 'APPARITION *1959. Oil on board, 47¼ × 47½"*

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designed by Herbert Matter,

have been printed by Joh. Enschedé en Zonen, Haarlem,

in May 1963

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